DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 399 486 CG 027 013

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TITLE Career Counseling for Native Youth: What Kind and by Whom?: ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation, Ottawa (Ontario).; ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Greensboro, NC.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-CG-95-46
PUB DATE 95
CONTRACT RR93002004
NOTE 4p.; In its: Exemplary Career Development Programs & Practices: The Best from Canada, 1995, see ED 382 900.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Canada Natives; *Career Counseling; Career Development; Counseling Effectiveness; Counseling Techniques; *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Context; Cultural Pluralism; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Racial Bias; *School Counselors; Youth
IDENTIFIERS Canada; ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

It is essential for career counselors working with Canadian Native youth to be cognizant of Native communication patterns, which include non-intrusive listening, story-telling, patience, and respect for family influences. Native students and their parents want non-biased treatment, information, and guidance from counselors so as to ensure both successful navigation of the school culture and transition to worklife. There is a great deal of diversity among Native groups. Counselors must not fall into the trap of seeing all Natives as the same, or as "different in the same ways." A counselor's best tools are: knowledge of Native culture and protocol; a personal, informal, and accessible counseling style; useful knowledge about the school and work; humor, patience, respect for world-views (including balance, harmony, spirituality and non-intrusiveness); and an ability to relate to native youth on the basis of their strengths and successes, rather than their failures and deficits. Contains seven references. (RB)

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Career Counseling for Native Youth: What Kind and by Whom?: ERIC Digest.

by R. Vance Peavy

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON COUNSELING AND STUDENT SERVICES

ERIC DIGEST

1995

EDO-CG-95-46

Career Counseling For Native Youth: What Kind And By Whom?

R. Vance Peavy

Overview

One of the most sobering realizations about career counseling with Native youth is that almost no research has been done on Native career development—we do not even know to what extent the term "career" is culturally sensible to Native people. Working formulations conducted by the author and several graduate students (MacNeill, 1994; Peavy, 1993, 1994) has led to some working formulations about the concept of career with Native clients.

- Personal and cultural identity is a critical issue for Native youth. They are often caught between two cultural worlds—bicultural personhood is hard to come by for many and rejected by others.

- The life path, and career path, of many Native individuals is unbelievably chaotic and unpredictable, especially for "transitional" individuals. Family deterioration, deculturation, and racial discrimination produce extremely turbulent lives with little trace of "career" path.

- The need for healing, identity authentication, and self-esteem building is so pressing for some Native clients that career and educational counseling must be part of an integrated approach which encounters the "whole" person.

- Psychometrically oriented approaches to career counseling are inappropriate for many Native clients. As one person put it, "We do not want you to develop culture-fair tests for our children—we want you to *stop testing them!*"

- High expectations play an important part in many Native cultures. The traditional family depended for its survival on the sharing and cooperation of all family members. Praise was seldom given. It was simply expected that each person would do the very best possible--that excellence would be striven for without praise. High skill and quality products were their own rewards. There was reluctance to do something unless the probability of success was high. Appreciation was shown, not by vocalizing praise, but by asking people to continue doing what they were already doing. One of the tasks of counselors working with Native youth is to find ways to tap into the naturally occurring ethic of high expectations and help Native clients to apply this ethic in school culture and in dominant society worklife.

While differences exist among Native groups as to the kind of counseling suitable for their children and youth, there is almost remarkable unanimity, which goes back decades, concerning the need for, and the nature of, culturally appropriate counseling for Native youth (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Peavy, 1993).

The Kind of Counseling Native Leaders and Parents Want

The National Indian Brotherhood (1972) document primarily addressed education for Native children and youth. A discussion of counseling contained the following requests:

- Availability of counseling for Indians by Indians, both on and off reserves.

- Provision of more culturally appropriate sensitization and training for non-Native counselors who counsel Natives.

- Recognition that existing counseling services for Native youth are not only ineffective, but in some instances contribute to the failure of Native students in school.

- Provision of Native para-professional counselor-aides to increase liaison with families and Band councils.

- Each school with Native students should provide counseling and guidance services which ensure that Native students are prepared for the *challenge of living and working after leaving school.*

The Kind of Counselors and Counseling Native Youth Want

Recent studies of counseling for Native youth in British Columbia (Peavy, 1994) and the Yukon (MacNeill, 1994) identified characteristics which Native youth search for in counselors and which contribute to counseling success, (i.e., the extent to which Native youth describe the counselor as a safe and helpful person).

- A counselor should be like a best friend—someone who knows when to speak and when to stay quiet, some-

one who has been through rocky times too.

- A counselor should be personal but non-invasive.

- A counselor must be perceived as "safe." Word of betrayal of confidence travels fast through a Native community.

- A counselor should be accessible on a "drop-in" basis.

- Counselors should be actively involved in providing a Native presence in the school.

- A counselor should be known in the community and should know family members by name.

- A counselor must be patient, accepting, and humorous.

- A counselor must be familiar with the many struggles of Native youth. This includes coping with addictions, grief, homesickness, segregation, suicide, discrimination, adoption, cross-band rivalries, pregnancy, sexual and physical abuse, neglect, lack of role-models, and shame and confusion about personal and cultural identity.

- A counselor need not be Native (although this helps) but must have non-biased knowledge about Native culture and protocol.

- A counselor should be informal and treat Native students as having equal status with other students. As Native students in one discussion said, "We don't want to be just shoved along through school, nor segregated into special rooms or seen as having deficits or being slow. ... We want counselors to help ensure that we take courses needed to go on for further education and to prepare us for work."

- A counselor should understand the need of many Native youth to be in a healing process.

- Counselors should know about the need of most, but not all, Native youth for spirituality. As one informant put it: "We have a special relationship with the land, with ancestors, with our community, and with nature. To achieve harmony is sometimes more important than anything else."

Summary Guidelines for Counselors Serving Native Youth

Our own research and that of others (Heinrich, Corvine, & Thomas; 1990; Epp, 1985) supports guidelines which can help counselors be culturally sensible with Native youth:

- Within the school, take an informal, personal, friendly, non-invasive, and accessible stance.

- Participate in Native community happenings and become acquainted with family members.

- Concentrate on the best in students first, problems next. Move cautiously in the area of "personality" and feelings.

- Recognize and respect world-views based on harmony, non-interference, trust, and spirituality.

- Use career exploration strategies based on doing, not on telling.

- Actively work to create a "Native presence" in the school and cultural awareness among all members of the school culture.

- Create Native community networks and identify Native role-models for the purpose of helping Native youth with transitions from home to school, school to school, remote community to urban school, and from school to work experience.

- Above all, practice patience, understanding, acceptance, informality and earn the trust of both Native youth and their family members.

Conclusion

It is essential for career counselors working with Native youth to be cognizant of Native communication patterns, which include non-intrusive listening, story-telling, patience, and respect for family influences. Native students and their parents want non-biased treatment, information, and guidance from counselors to ensure both successful navigation of the school culture and transition to worklife. There is a great deal of diversity among Native groups. Counselors must not fall into the trap of seeing all Natives as the same, or as "different in the same ways." A counselor's best tools are knowledge of Native culture and protocol, a personal, informal, and accessible counseling style, useful knowledge about the school and work, humor, patience, respect for world-views—including balance, harmony, spirituality and non-intrusiveness—and an ability to relate to Native youth on the basis of their strengths and successes, rather than their failures and deficits.

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